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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001095

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PARLIAMENT OPENS, VIOLENCE ENSUES

REF: TBILISI 1055

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: On June 12, Parliament convened for the first time since the protests started on April 9. The day was marked by violence as protesters attacked MP Gia Tortladze and threw rocks, eggs, and other objects at Speaker Bakradze. Five protesters were arrested in connection with the incidents. This came after similar incidents on June 11 when the Chairman of the Electoral Commission, Levan Tarkhnishvili was assaulted by protesters, as he entered the UK's Queen's Birthday celebration at the Rustaveli Theater. Condemnations by the French Ambassador, EU representative Semneby, and the USG were met with a defiant response by the non-parliamentary opposition who demanded that those protesters arrested for committing violence be immediately freed. Speaker Bakradze hailed the international community's response and urged dialogue. Meanwhile, Irakli Alasania (Alliance) announced that he would be creating his own political party and would not continue to be a part of ongoing protests. Alasania was the only prominent non-parliamentary leader who condemned the assaults. There were additional detentions June 15 as police broke up non-parliamentary opposition led demonstrations outside the Dighomi police station where the five protesters were being held (reported septel). End Summary.

12. (C) Comment: Despite claims of support for non-violence and peaceful protests, non-parliamentary opposition figures largely condoned the violence and chose to condemn the U.S. and others for issuing statements regarding the incidents. The non-parliamentary reaction to the June 11 and June 12 assaults is troubling as many leaders blamed the GoG for the actions of their protesters. Even Alasania couched his condemnation noting the overall political context could not be forgotten when considering the violent incidents. Non-parliamentary leaders show little ability or willingness to control the ever more confrontational protesters and instead have called for more radical actions eschewing any responsibility for the potential consequences that may follow. We will urge non-parliamentary leaders and the GoG to show restraint and continue to encourage dialogue. Nonetheless, a clearly frustrated, desperate non-parliamentary opposition appears more inclined to seek to create incidents than engage in talks. End Comment.

Attacks and Arrests

13. (C) On June 11, while arriving to attend the Queen's birthday reception hosted by the British Embassy, Chairman of the Electoral Commission Levan Tarkhnishvili's car was pelted with eggs. Tarkhnishvili was whistled at and booed by the crowd, then subsequently approached by two middle aged men who punched him repeatedly. Tarkhnishvili is considering pressing charges against the protesters. At the same event, political commentator and former Education Minister Gia Nodia was verbally assaulted, and his car was hit by eggs. On June 12, outside of Parliament during a plenary session,

protesters physically assaulted opposition MP Gia Tortladze (Strong Georgia), slapping him in the face several times. Protesters threw rocks, eggs, and other objects at Speaker Bakradze's vehicle. Other MPs' cars were spray painted as they tried to get by the crowd. Six men were arrested in connection with the violence outside of Parliament. One received a fine while the other five received were administratively detained -- receiving jail time of 25-30 days. Qadministratively detained -- receiving jail time of 25-30 days.

14. (C) Irakli Alasania was the only non-parliamentary leader to condemn the attack saying that "throwing stones is absolutely unacceptable and it (the violence) requires an adequate assessment from all political parties" before noting that "we should not forget the context in which this is happening - a very difficult political situation." Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia) said that "nobody likes it when somebody is throwing a stone but not a single person responsible for attacks on protesters has been arrested." In response to the assaults on MPs, Levan Gachechiladze said that "he wanted corridors of shame arranged" and that "these MPs are serving an evil force". Republican party activist Tina Khidasheli condemned parliamentary guard forces, accusing them of attacking "children". (Embassy Note: Post has reviewed videotape evidence of the attacks and saw no evidence that the GoG used any force. The videotapes clearly show protesters attacking and assaulting various MPs both physically and verbally. Khidasheli apparently was referring to the group of extremely angry 25-30 year old men attacking MPs as the "children" whom the GoG attacked. End Note.) David Gamkrelidze (Alliance - New Rights) called for the immediate release of the arrested

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protesters and like Khidasheli,condemned the GoG for answering the peaceful protesters with violence.

Condemnations and Counter-Condemnations

15. (C) In addition to the USG June 14 statement, French Ambassador, Eric Fournier issued a statement that condemned the violence saying that "democracy was insulted" and "that everybody should know that this is a criminal act." EU Representative Peter Semneby said that the violence was extremely troubling and called upon non-parliamentary leaders to explain to their supporters that such actions are "unacceptable". Non-parliamentary opposition leaders immediately criticized Fournier, Semneby, and USG statements.

Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) said that "(t)he embassies got activated to our disappointment. This is considered as interference in domestic political processes, which they are not entitled to do. That is why diplomats should abstain from such statements." Kakha Kukava (Conservatives) said "(s)uch assessments should be unbiased, since (sic) before MP Gia Tortladze got slapped, hundreds of Georgian citizens had been brutally tortured over the past two months. So all of this should be assessed in context and it should be said what caused the aggression against these MPs. The fact that violence begets violence is an axiom about which we have long been warning both the GoG and the international community."

16. (C) Speaker Bakradze hailed the international community's reaction and said that a "clear-cut" condemnation of the June 12 incident by Georgia's western partners should be "a clear signal" for all political parties. In an interview, Bakradze thanked foreign diplomats saying that "it is a very rare case when foreign diplomats react on internal processes ongoing in a country so clearly and distinctly." Bakradze singled out the U.S. statement saying that "(s)uch a clear statement, a written statement that the incidents, which took place on Friday, is no mere expression of opinion and represents criminal activity, should be a serious signal for Georgian society, generally, and for all opposition leaders, who think that by such actions they can bring

something positive to the country. Such actions cannot bring anything but negative consequences to the country." Bakradze then said the time for throwing stones was finished and that all parties should engage in dialogue based upon mutual respect.

Alasania Announces Political Party Intentions

17. (C) Alasania announced on June 14 that he would inaugurate his political party sometime in July. He said that he would continue to cooperate with Alliance members, New Rights and Republicans. Alasania said he would pursue a three-pronged tactic of issue-based protests, negotiations with authorities and working with the international community. Alasania briefed the Ambassador on June 13 before his announcement and explained that he was further distancing himself from the protests. He dismissed rumors of a rift between himself and Levan Gachechiladze or of a marginalized status within the non-parliamentary opposition. As evidence that all was well, Alasania said that he was asked to lead Defend Georgia, a group Levan Gachechiladze was considering forming. Alasania said that he doubted how receptive either Gachechiladze or Burjanadze would be towards dialogue and compromise. He said that both had constructed their own alternative reality as to the current state of affairs, dismissing polling and other objective data. Alasania also Qdismissing polling and other objective data. Alasania also said that Speaker Bakradze had not been in contact with him for quite some time. Despite his apparent willingness to engage in substantive talks with the GoG, Alasania told the Ambassador that he would not participate in the Constitutional Commission but would likely submit proposals.

TEFFT